

my attention when I was in Nashville this summer. We met to discuss the plight of the Baha'i in Iran.

The Baha'i faith was founded in Persia in 1844 and is one of the fastest growing religions in the world, with more than five million followers in more than 200 countries and territories. It is the largest non-Muslim religious community in Iran today.

Baha'i followers have been persecuted for their faith by the Iranian Government since their religion was established, but the frequency and severity of the persecutions has increased under the Presidency of Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad. More than two years ago, a group of seven Baha'i leaders, often referred to as the "Yaran" or "friends," were arrested. They were charged with pursuing propaganda activities against Islam and for spying on behalf of Israel. After more than two years of "temporary" confinement, the seven were tried in a closed court proceeding that did not meet even the minimum international standards for proper criminal procedure and protection of civil rights. The six men and one woman were each sentenced to 20 years in prison on August 8.

This is yet another example of the Iranian Government striking out against its own people. We saw violent examples of this in June of last year, when Iranian citizens began protesting the unfair Presidential election. Those who dare differ with the government face baseless charges, closed court proceedings, extremely harsh sentences, and possibly even death. The international community has expressed its outrage about the sentencing of this group, and Secretary of State Clinton issued a statement on August 12 that reaffirms our country's commitment to protecting religious freedom around the world, including that of the Baha'i in Iran.

This is more than a story from the other side of the world. There are more than 168,000 Baha'i in the United States. There are more than 2,000 in my home State of Tennessee. The men and women with whom I met in August have family members—fathers, mothers, sons, brothers, and in-laws—who have been arrested and imprisoned in Iran simply because of their faith. Their only request was that we, as Members of the United States Senate, continue to do all that we can to keep the spotlight on Iran and its persecution of peaceful citizens.

That is why I wanted to bring this matter to the attention of the Senate today. The United States has already imposed sanctions on Iran by enacting the Iran Sanctions Act. I hope by shining a spotlight on this extreme and continued abuse of peaceful adherence of the Baha'i faith by the Iranian Government, we can, No. 1, reaffirm our commitment to religious freedom around the world; and No. 2, make a little more uncomfortable the regime in Iran which perpetrates these crimes against its own people.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BEGICH). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MIKHAIL KHODORKOVSKY TRIAL

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, in June of this year, I joined my friend and colleague, Senator BEN CARDIN, on the Senate floor to discuss an issue of great concern to both of us and to many Americans and to many advocates of freedom and the rule of law internationally. That issue is the ongoing trial in Russia of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and his business partner, Platon Lebedev.

This trial, or what Gary Kasparov writing for the Wall Street Journal called "the latest judicial travesty," came to a close November 2. A decision by the court is expected on December 15.

Khodorkovsky was first arrested in 2003 and convicted in 2005. This trial was unfair and politically motivated according to Western human rights groups, Western media, and many other independent observers. There is broad opinion that this second trial has been staged, has not provided the opportunity to judge facts in a clear, impartial manner, and in general has not honored the rule of law.

I know this is not a jury trial. The finder of fact is a single judge. Many have claimed that this judge has come under both direct and indirect pressure in this case. In addition, the prosecution has used language in closing arguments as if a guilty verdict had already been rendered. Sadly, there seems to be little hope for a just verdict from this second trial, and now Khodorkovsky and Lebedev will face the prospect of many more years in jail. These men have already served 7 years in prison and paid an unjust price for a politically inspired campaign against them. They have sacrificed much of their lives, their freedoms, and their rights. It is time for both men to be set free and for justice to be served in Russia.

This case is broader than Khodorkovsky and Lebedev as individuals. It raises the question about whether there are truly independent functioning institutions in Russia. A guilty verdict would show that when Russian authorities want to, they can act above the law, as they did in the first trial. It would also underscore that property rights in Russia are meaningless, sending a chilling message to investors and businesses alike, both domestically in Russia and internationally. I fear we will see more cases where rights are violated and the legal process undermined.

Thankfully, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Russian authorities

to hide the illegitimacy of the charges and the process. Government officials, human rights activists, journalists, and others continue to raise questions about the legitimacy of this trial.

Some might suggest that we in the Congress and we in America should refrain from commenting on cases in a sovereign nation's court system. I disagree. I do not think this is true when a nation's court system is clearly not independent and is being used to undermine the rule of law and fundamental democratic principles.

I have led efforts to support congressional resolutions and hearings to draw attention to specific issues about this case because I believe they are symbolic of broader and disturbing trends in Russia. I and other colleagues in the Senate will continue to do so.

As I said in June of this year:

The United States stands behind those who call for freedom from tyranny and justice around the world. We must continue to stand with Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev.

As a second flawed trial comes to conclusion, this is truer now than ever before. The international community will be closely watching the outcome of this case. I urge my colleagues, President Obama, and the administration to do the same. I hope Russia will choose the right path and somehow that justice will prevail in this infamous case.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

WELCOMING HIS EXCELLENCY BRONISLAW KOMOROWSKI

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on April 10, 2010, as word spread of the tragic plane crash that killed President Lech Kaczynski, First Lady Maria Kaczynski, and scores of other Polish patriots, Poles gathered by the thousands outside St. John's Church in Warsaw, grieving for their terrible loss. That loss was also felt around the world. On that unspeakably sad day, I visited the Polish Consulate in Chicago to pay my respects. People were streaming to the consulate from all over Chicago and throughout the Midwest. They drove with Polish flags proudly displayed on their cars and waited in long lines to sign the condolence book, leave flowers, or simply whisper a prayer.

Days later, the U.S. Senate observed a moment of silence for all those who lost their lives in the Katyn Forest in Smolensk and for the heartbroken people of Poland. Some asked then: How will Poland survive such a devastating loss?

The people of Poland did so by relying, as they always have, on faith, family and freedom. On July 4, the Polish people chose their fourth democratically elected leader. Today, that leader, President Bronislaw Komorowski, is making his first visit as President of Poland to the United States. We are honored he is here.